



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Hepatitis A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis (hep-ah-TY-tiss) A is a vaccine-preventable inflammation of the liver caused by the Hepatitis A virus, which is found in the stool of an infected person. Hepatitis A virus is not found in animals. Hepatitis A rarely causes long-term liver damage or death.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

Symptoms usually begin 28-30 days (range of 15-50 days) after exposure and usually last less than 2 months. People are most contagious from about 2 weeks before symptoms begin until 2 weeks after. Some people, especially children, may have no symptoms, but can still spread the virus to others. Symptoms include:

- Diarrhea
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Tiredness
- Stomach pain
- Fever
- Dark urine
- Pale, clay-colored stool
- Joint Pain
- Loss of appetite
- Yellowing of skin and eyeballs (jaundice)

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A virus is passed in the stool and people become infected by having contact with the stool of an infected person (fecal-oral route). For this reason, the virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or

where good personal hygiene is not common. Casual contact, as in the usual workplace or school setting, does not spread the virus.

Who is at risk for getting hepatitis A?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness. Persons are at risk for hepatitis A infection if they:

- Traveling to countries where hepatitis A is common and where there is little clean water or proper sewage disposal.
- Drink or swallow untreated water.
- Eat food prepared by an infected person.
- Eating raw produce or raw shellfish (e.g., oysters).
- Exposure to the stool or blood of an infected person.
- Persons working with nonhuman primates.

How do I know if I have hepatitis A?

A person having diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours or have jaundice should consult a health care provider immediately. The health care provider may collect a blood sample to test for hepatitis A.

How is hepatitis A treated?

There is no treatment for hepatitis A other than treating symptoms. People who have had hepatitis A develop lifelong immunity and cannot get hepatitis A again.

How is hepatitis A prevented?

In general, hepatitis A can be prevented by strictly adhering to the following guidelines:

- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A (Two-dose series).
- Wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom; after swimming; and before, during, and after food preparation.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.
- Do not change diapers near recreational water.
- When traveling outside the United States, drink bottled drinks, do not eat uncooked produce unless you peel them yourself, do not eat foods or drinks from street vendors, and do not drink or eat local water or ice.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/A/index.htm>.

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

This page was last reviewed May 21, 2014.